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## **Bi-Partisan Plan Will Save Mighty Mac**

### *Former Senator Heads Citizens' Group to Fight Tolls, Save Bridge*

LANSING – Legislation to ensure the long-term vitality of the Mackinac Bridge was presented to the Governor yesterday as a citizens group, headed by former state Sen. Walter North (R-St. Ignace), also announced its formation.

“As the use grows, and the pressure builds, the Mackinac Bridge ages and wears almost imperceptibly,” said state Sen. Jason Allen (R-Traverse City), a sponsor in the five-bill Mackinac Bridge Preservation Package. “We’ve all seen just how devastating the effect of age and neglect can be on the electric-power infrastructure. Will we allow the same thing to happen to the bridge?”

North, who served in the Senate from 1995 to 2003, will serve as chairman of the group, which is composed of members from Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Chippewa, Delta, Emmet, Mackinac, Otsego and Presque Isle counties.

“In her first state of the state speech, Gov. Jennifer Granholm referred to the bridge many times, saying that there is ‘no greater symbol’ in all of Michigan to show unity, strength and perseverance,” North said. “As such, our group proudly echoes the governor’s words by naming itself No Greater Symbol.

“Our objective is to encourage Michiganians everywhere – in the U.P., metro Detroit, Southwest Michigan, the Thumb, and everything in between – to support the bridge and contact the governor’s office by phone or letter, urging her to sign the Mackinac Bridge Preservation Package,” North said.

“It is very encouraging to see the citizens of Michigan feel so passionately about the Mackinac Bridge that they have formed a group to encourage governor Granholm to sign this legislation,” said Allen.

During the next few years the Mackinac Bridge, without the legislation, would have to generate a large sum of money in order to make repairs and upgrades necessary to keep it safe and functioning. The current revenue stream does not provide the necessary funding to undertake these repairs without a dramatic increase in tolls.

(More)

The package of bills will ensure that the Mackinac Bridge receives the funding needed to remain viable and safe, while keeping tolls at a minimum.

Currently, the state receives approximately \$5.25 million from the federal government for the bridge. By asking the state to dedicate a similar amount of money to the Mackinac Bridge would greatly reduce the stress placed on tourism and especially the trucking industry by the recent toll increase.

**SB 464 (Allen)**

Amends PA 214 of 1952

MCL 254.312

This bill allows the Mackinac Bridge Authority to continue to operate the bridge after the debts are forgiven and requires that authority investigate lowering the tolls.

**HB 4631 (Shackleton)**

Amends PA 51 of 1951

MCL 247.661

This bill would amend the State Trunk Line Fund to allocate a specific amount to the Mackinac Bridge Authority in order to maintain the bridge. This amendment will require \$5.25 million be appropriated annually to the Mackinac Bridge Authority from the State Trunk Line Fund, to match what the state gets from the federal government.

**SB 466 (Barcia)**

Amends PA 403 of 2000

MCL 207.1163

This bill strikes language that would require the bridge to be maintained as a free bridge when the advances are forgiven.

**SB 4630 (Brown)**

Amends PA 214 of 1952

MCL 254.322

This bill would allow emergency vehicles to cross the bridge without paying a toll if they are responding to an emergency situation. This would also create a toll exemption for the authority's own vehicles. Currently, both emergency vehicles and the authority's vehicles are charged tolls to cross the bridge.

**HB 4627 (Casperson)**

Amends PA 214 of 1952

MCL 254.317

This bill forgives the advances made by the State of Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge Authority. It also removes the provision requiring the bridge to be free once the bonds are forgiven.